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ABSTRACT

This practicum report describes the development and implementation of a program to increase parent participation in the planning and conducting of activities sponsored by the district-level special education parent advisory committee. Monthly meetings and social events were held to encourage the 250 special education families to be more involved with their children's school programs. Major difficulties were experienced in practicum implementation and only one of three outcomes was achieved. Bureaucratic problems and lack of teacher encouragement of parent participation were considered as partial causes for continuing low parent participation. The Survey of Attitude Regarding Parent Involvement and its results are appended. Contains 40 references. (DB)

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ED 373 495

Increasing the Number of Actively Involved Parents in the Education of Their Special Needs Child

by

Nancy C. Diamond

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Cluster 42

A Practicum II Report Presented to the Ed.D. Program
in Early and Middle Childhood in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA UNIVERSITY

1994

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Approved:

6/14/94
Date of Final Approval of Report

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ABSTRACT

Increasing the Number of Actively Involved Parents in the Education of Their Special Needs Child. Diamond, Nancy C., 1994: Practicum II Report, Nova University, Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood. Descriptors: Parent Participation/Communication Skills/Parent Teacher Cooperation/Special Education/School Activities/Parent School Relationship/Disabilities

Many educational communities, including the state and local school district where this practicum took place, are searching for ways to involve parents in the education of their children. This publication presents the development and implementation of a district level special education parent advisory committee. The goal was to increase the number of parents of special education students in the planning and conducting of activities sponsored by the committee. Several possible solutions and information concerning school and parent relationships are discussed in the review of the literature.

This document describes the goal and three outcomes initially designed by the writer and the documentation of what actually occurred during the implementation process. There were several obstacles that were present in the early stages of the project that encumbered the writer's ability to get the project started as originally planned. Several strategies needed to be used to initiate the project within the initial time frame. The data shows that growth occurred in all three outcome areas but only one of the projected outcomes was completely met.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Work Setting and Community

This practicum was conducted in a small middle class suburban school district. Located in a suburb of a major urban city, the school district serviced more than 2,800 full-time day students in kindergarten through grade 12. In addition, a full-time adult and alternative education program was offered with both day and evening classes. The enrollment in the adult program varied.

The community, encompassing approximately four square miles, was predominantly residential with several small and mid-sized businesses. The area had approximately 6,500 homes. These consisted of small bungalows, small brick ranches and three low income federal housing projects.

Businesses were located within small strip malls or on independently owned properties. During the past 15 years, household incomes had declined from upper middle class to the lower socio-economic group. Many homes were previously owned by professionals and leaders within the business community. At the time of this practicum, the majority of

home owners were working in blue collar positions, outside the immediate geographic area.

The majority of families were Caucasian. However, the area also included a population of Afro-Americans, a few Native Americans and a growing Asiatic (predominantly Vietnamese and Chinese) population.

One section within the four square mile area, had a high incidence of drug and alcohol abuse. This area had been the target of many drug raids by police and was the home of most of the minority population. Also, the majority of the residents of this area were receiving either welfare assistance or Aide to Dependent Children.

The staff of the school district consisted of approximately 150 certified teachers and 75 non-certified personnel. Among the staff were 22 special education teachers and 7 teaching assistants.

The special education students came from all areas within the school district. Students attended either one of the five local schools or a specialized county-based school for the more severely impaired.

The enrollment for the pre-school through twelfth grade special education program was approximately 360 students. Within this population, 96 were between the ages of three and five years. Approximately 50 students were placed in the out-of-district county-based schools. The remainder were enrolled in classroom programs, resources rooms and general education with the support of a teacher consultant.

Approximately 150 were certified as speech and language impaired in the K-12 program.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

The writer, with 17 years of experience, was a teacher in this suburban school system. For the past 12 years, the writer had been involved in various special education programs in the local district. As a special education teacher, the writer had chaired the district's special education parent advisory committee for the past two years. However, a change in teaching assignments had occurred and during the year of implementation, the writer worked as a first grade general educational teacher.

An agreement was reached with the administration that would allow the writer to continue as an active facilitator for the district's special education parent advisory committee.

Discussions with the special education director and special education consultants within the county had prompted many questions about parent involvement. Many individuals, including legislators, educators and parents had voiced concerns about how restructured schools would service children with special needs. Special education consultants were encouraging local school districts to explore different methodologies and report their progress. Several service options were being tried in different parts of the State. Unfortunately, they had not been in existence long enough to

provide reliable data.

Within the writer's work setting, the current special education director and the central office administration were encouraging teachers to investigate and employ new methodologies and service models within the schools. A few teachers had made some minor adjustments toward integrating children with special needs into the general education setting.

The writer and others were concerned about the need to improve the delivery of educational services to special needs students. To change services and/or the delivery of services, all parties involved in the child's program needed to be part of the process. Among those that should have been involved were educators, therapists, psychologists, social workers and parents. At the time of practicum implementation, the involvement of parents of special needs students was minimal.

It was the opinion of this writer, and many others within the State, that successful transition would hinge on joint partnerships between parents and schools. Since there was a common interest with the school administration, the writer selected and received approval to investigate new methods of increasing parental involvement and making parents more active in their child's education.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

In communities across the nation, individuals identified as different because of a handicapping condition are singled out and removed from the mainstream of society. The school is no exception. Children with disabilities are separated from their peers. They are not expected to master the curriculum at the same speed as their non-handicapped peers. Adult expectations are often predetermined by the handicapping label that the "system" places on them. As a result, many parents of these children often feel uncomfortable participating in the educational process. Others do not understand the necessity of parent participation.

The parents of the special education students involved in this practicum were no exception. The district's parent advisory committee had been active for as long as the special education department had existed. The committee's members had usually consisted of one or two parents and four or five staff members. Thus, the majority of the

committee's involvement had been staff not parents.

In the past, activities were conducted only once or twice a year. Teachers and other staff members within the department had no input into the decision making process and were simply notified after the plans were made by the committee. Teachers, students and parents were usually notified by a written note or memo. Participation had been minimal.

There were several reasons for poor parent involvement. Several parents were previously enrolled in special education programs themselves. The limited abilities of some of these individuals could have been impairing their involvement in their child's education. Others told negative stories of their own educational experiences. These parents may not have wanted to become involved in something that they viewed as adverse in their own lives.

Today's educational system is being restructured. Schools are in various stages of the change process. The instructional methods are not the same traditional worksheets that most parents experienced in their education. School assignments are more complex and interrelated to other subjects. Therefore, some parents may find it difficult to understand project requirements.

Another reason for the limited involvement may be that in many of today's families either one or both parents work. These adults are limited to the amount and the types of involvement in which they can participate. Those that work

during the day are not available to volunteer to work in the schools. Others have working hours that require that their schedule is opposite that of their child's.

The problem, therefore, was to design an appropriate district parent involvement program for families with special education students. It was important to provide a variety of activities that included parents, staff and the special needs child. These activities were to encourage an increased number of parents of special education students to be actively involved in their child's education.

Problem Documentation

The existing parent advisory committee consisted of the writer, the director of special education, one certified teacher and two parents. The committee had conducted monthly meetings. On several occasions the committee has unsuccessfully tried to get other parents to attend committee meetings.

Evidence of the problem was supported by several methods during the 1992-93 school year. Data was collected through observations, teacher discussions and attendance records.

Meeting attendance records were kept during the 1992-1993 school year. During this time, no more than four parents attended any committee meeting. Of the four, only two attended consistently throughout the year.

During the year, two fundraisers were scheduled.

During the first fundraiser, two parents participated. During the second activity, the funds were generated by staff members.

Mid-year, the group decided to organize an evening pot luck dinner with entertainment. Staff members were contacted and assisted in organizing the evening. Notes were sent home three times prior to the activity requesting a response to the classroom teacher. Three days prior to the activity only two positive responses had been received. The staff decided to phone all families to get an attendance count of those who planned to attend. Phone responses indicated that only three families had planned to attend the activity. As a result, the activity was cancelled.

While conversing with several of the special education staff, the writer found that teachers reported a decline in the number of parents who attended school conferences. The elementary staff reported that about one-half of the parents of students on their case load attended parent-teacher conferences. In contrast, two high school teachers reported that they were lucky if two or three parents attended parent-teacher conferences.

Teachers also reported that they had difficulty getting students to return homework assignments. When students were asked if they requested help at home a frequent answer was that parents were unable to assist them. Student responses, regarding parent assistance, included the parents' inability to understand directions, they didn't have time and they had

other things to do that were more important than school.

Each building has a parent organization that initiates and/or supports activities for students. While looking at each building's organization, the writer found only three parents of special education children who were actively involved.

Causative Analysis

When a student first experiences difficulty in the educational environment, the parents are notified and requested to assist in the educational process. Many parents work closely with the school to help improve their child's progress. In many situations this is all that is needed to help make a child successful. Unfortunately, this simple solution is not effective if the child is in need of special education services.

Ineffective early intervention techniques often bring the parent and child into the referral and assessment process for special education services. Most parents continue to work and be actively involved during the various stages of identification and certification. However, in the writer's school district, parent involvement diminishes after the student has been identified, certified and placed in a special education program.

The reasons for minimal parent involvement may be varied. In meetings, many educators have voiced that certification just gives a parent an out for not dealing

with the "real problem." This has been especially true if the staff identifies the handicap as emotionally impaired. Unfortunately, these same professionals appear to have tunnel vision and do not think of other variables that could affect parental involvement.

Some parents have difficulty accepting that their child needs extra help to succeed in the educational process. Others may not feel that the certification designates their child as totally different from other children. In either case, it is possible that parents may suddenly feel inadequate to help their child.

After a child has been identified as handicapped, parents need support in order to understand effectively the impact of the student's certification. Some families do not have a support system in place that can help during the transition of accepting a child as handicapped. In talking to these parents, they often expressed feelings of social isolation and helplessness. They frequently believed that they were the only ones to have ever felt guilty, inferior, and/or inadequate when dealing with a special needs student.

During the initial planning meeting, parents were extremely outnumbered by professionals who often told them what should be done for the handicapped child. The atmosphere created during planning meetings resulted in either positive or negative feelings about the educational community and how much external support they could expect.

What went through a parent's mind during these meetings

was valuable after the student entered the special education process. Parents sometimes thought that they did something wrong, that they caused the handicap. They believed that other people did not understand their situation. These feelings were often projectile in nature. Many times, these feelings and concerns were the result of not having the knowledge necessary to make a comfortable and appropriate decision regarding their child's education.

It was important that educators and other ancillary staff be sensitive to parental feelings and concerns. Unfortunately, colleges and universities have not provided adequate training programs to assist professionals on how to work effectively with parents.

The staff did not contact parents frequently. They failed to relate both the child's strengths and weaknesses. Many educators felt the pressure of time. They only contacted parents with negative news. Educators often defended the good that occurred within the institutional walls. However, this methodology reinforced the reverse.

In several situations, parents had limited functioning abilities. Some were special education students when they were in school. These parents needed even more support than the others. It was imperative that the educational institution be aware of outside resources that could have offered support to these families.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

Education for handicapped students has not always been available within the public school setting. For decades, children with handicapping conditions were educated in environments segregated from the general population. In 1975, The Education for All Handicapped Act was passed by Congress. Codified as Public Law 94-142, it guarantees public school education for children with special needs. It mandates that students not only receive a public education, but that these services be provided in the least restrictive environment for that student. Public Law 94-142 requires that each child receiving services through this law have an Individual Educational Program designed for their specific needs. It also stipulates the various types of service models available to special needs students (Hallahan and Kauffman, 1988).

During the past 17 years, students with various handicapping conditions have been educated in a variety of different public educational settings. Some children have received services within the local community school, while others have received services in separate public school buildings. Student placement is determined by a committee of professional staff and active parent involvement based upon the needs of the student (Katsiyannis & Ward, 1992).

In the Education of the Handicapped Amendments, Public Law 99-457 not only reinforces parent involvement but

mandates comprehensive services to families of young handicapped children. In this legislation, agencies that service disabled infants must not only address the needs of the infant but also the needs of the family (Brantlinger, 1991).

Young children, like school age students, must be provided with a continuum of services that allows students to be integrated into the least restrictive environment. To accomplish this task for a disabled infant requires providing services to the family. This type of planning can become very costly. Therefore, P.L. 99-457 requires all agencies share in the costs of providing services to families with disabled young children (Smith & Strain, 1988).

Considerable literature has been written since the early 1980s about the need for educational reform. Education has been undergoing considerable change. A new progressive school movement has required educators to analyze various teaching techniques and curriculum modifications.

Even though many articles have been written pertaining to the need for educational reform and meeting the needs of every student, most have not addressed the area of special education. There may have been several reasons for the omission of special education in most reform literature. One possible reason was that special education has always been considered a separate system that already required

programming for individual differences (Lilly, 1987). A second reason might be the current trend toward inclusive education. This type of program places the student with special needs in the same educational setting that services the general population.

Although many people would have all students attain a prescribed standard of performance, it is unrealistic to expect this from some special needs students. Sapon-Shevin (1987) discussed special needs students and how they fit into the educational reform movement. She has alerted educators to the possibility that special needs students may become victims of discrimination by requiring standards that were too high for them to attain.

In order to service all children in a general education setting, many difficulties needed to be addressed. Regular education teachers believed "that students in regular classes should be able to do the regular work that everyone else does" (Messersmith & Piantek, 1988, p. 66). Since past practice has kept children with major handicapping conditions out of the mainstream, regular education teachers had had limited experiences involving students with special needs. Previous limited inclusion of handicapped students unfortunately has not helped build a positive attitude toward these students. Many general education teachers have felt that they have inadequate skills and they were anxious about working with handicapped students. Likewise, they were not in favor of integrating students with profound

handicaps into the mainstream (Center & Ward, 1987). In order to reduce these anxious and inadequate feelings among general educators, extensive pre-service and in-service training would benefit instruction in the general education classroom (Center & Ward, 1987; Walters, 1987).

One reason for the trend toward integrating general and special education students has been the cost factor. In one study, conducted by Affleck, Madge, Adams & Lowenbraun (1988), it was concluded that the expensive cost of the resource room model was not justified since student achievement levels in the two programs did not significantly differ. Using research such as this, it was no wonder that administrators were looking at new service models for the handicapped student.

The possibility of helping all students while reforming the current educational system became an enticing thought to many educators. Schools should redesign programs so that they include at least the mildly handicapped student into the regular education program (Reynolds, Wang & Walberg, 1987). This would enhance the academic growth of the handicapped student and also assist in their acceptance into the mainstream of society. To improve this acceptance further, regular and special educators needed to collaborate and learn from each other (Bickel & Bickel, 1986). In fact, Will (1986) states that "special programs and regular education programs must be allowed to collectively contribute skills and resources to carry out individualized

educational plans" (p. 413) for the future of all students.

The educational restructuring of today's schools will involve moving more special needs students into the mainstream. To implement an inclusive setting for handicapped students also will require that parents become more active in the educational process. A further review of the literature gives evidence that parent and family involvement is a vital component to student programing success.

Greenwood & Hickman (1991) state "parent involvement suggests clearly that the home has at least as much influence on student learning and behavior as do the teacher and the school" (p. 287). They also concluded that the school and the home should work together to promote an effective educational system for students.

A coalition between home and school promotes not only the education of one child but assists in building a support system within the community. This support system is the foundation for school programs and philosophies (Coleman, 1991).

The role of the school is to provide programs that promote the development of the whole child. A close alliance between home and school during a child's education experience will increase "social, affective, and academic growth and achievement" (Jones, 1991, p. 7).

The effect of a total quality parent education program has been seen in many communities. Several studies of

parent follow through programs have been conducted in various locations across the nation. In these studies, parent involvement has been shown to provide positive benefits on children, parents, schools and communities. These studies have also shown that individuals are working collectively to improve not only their standard of living, but the community environment as well (Olmsted, 1991).

There is substantial evidence that parent involvement affects student progress. Schools across the nation claim to support parental involvement within their settings. However, the literature cites many reasons that impede parental involvement in educational process.

Individuals usually frequent places where they feel comfortable, secure and welcomed. Unfortunately, parents report that in many of our schools today educators make them feel uncomfortable (Jones, 1991). This may be partly because some educators feel that they must portray an image of condescending professionalism. This portrait often makes parents feel uncomfortable. Many report that they would rather have educators be more personal than professional (Lindle, 1989).

Teachers frequently complain about receiving minimal parent support. They don't seem to realize that their attitudes and beliefs may be impeding parent involvement. In fact, as teachers become more experienced, they report that parent involvement is less important to student success (Clarke & Williams, 1992). In addition, as a child gets

older, teachers frequently view them as more of a collaborator in the process than the parents (Michael, Arnold, Magliocca & Miller, 1992).

Lowry (1983) found that parents often feel isolated and helpless. Frequently, they do not have enough information or knowledge to allow them to make informed choices about educational decisions. These parents usually remain outside the educational environment rather than make their minimal knowledge known. Limited information is especially true among many parents of special needs students.

Every child has unique characteristics that place specific demands on the family. These demands are particularly true of special needs individuals and their families. In many situations, there may not be any common need elements among parents of special needs students (Ammer & Littleton, 1983). This just reinforces the feeling of isolation. These families and individuals need an advocate within the school that can help them communicate their needs and interests to the educational community (Cochran & Dean, 1991).

As the educational system undergoes change, inclusion of special needs children in the general education environment will increase. Educators will need to rely upon every resource available to provide services to children. Among these resources are the parents of every student enrolled in the system.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The goal of the writer was that an increased number of parents of special education students would participate in planning and conducting activities sponsored by the district special education parent advisory committee.

As with any situation where an organization needed assistance, parents needed to be contacted and made to feel that their help was essential. In this practicum, it was the desire that each involved parent feel important and be an active participant in their child's education. It was the expectation of the writer that parents of special education students would become more involved in both the academic and the social activities sponsored by the schools.

Outcomes and Evaluation Methodologies

It was anticipated that before any committee activities occurred, the administration, special education staff and parents who had been active previously in the organization would have been contacted and the practicum explained to them. The staff was requested to give the writer the names

of parents that they thought might assist if they were contacted. In addition, the writer planned to ask the staff for any additional ideas regarding the practicum.

After receiving parent names from the staff, the writer planned to contact each parent whose name was submitted and request their help. As an outcome, at least six parents out of those submitted were to help plan and conduct a fundraiser during the first two months of implementation. The success of this outcome was to be noted by observational logs.

To make the practicum successful, the district special education parent advisory committee needed at least six parents who were willing to work the entire school year. As a second outcome, the writer planned to schedule monthly meetings for the organization. It was expected that every meeting would have at least six parents in attendance. Attendance records were to be kept by the writer or a parent at each meeting.

In order to get participation from staff, parents and administration it was important to maintain communications during the entire practicum. The staff, parents and administration were asked for ideas, topics and general comments on the activities being planned by the advisory committee. Therefore, there were two expected outcomes. One was that a larger number of staff, parents and administration would feel involved in the activities planned by the committee. The second was that these groups would

feel more knowledgeable and better informed about the activities of the committee. In order to evaluate this expected outcome, identical surveys were to be conducted at the beginning and end of the practicum implementation. The results of the two surveys were to be compared. Outcome success was to be measured by having more surveys returned at the end of implementation. In addition, the responses of the second survey would indicate a better understanding of the organization's functions.

To assist in promoting parent involvement in the educational process, workshops were to be scheduled at least four times during the eight month implementation. Workshop participants were to include students and their parents from both the general and special education environments. The topics for the workshops were to be based upon suggestions from staff and administration. Parents were to evaluate the workshops at the end of each session. The expected outcome was that 30 of the 250 special education families would participate in at least one of the workshops.

To reinforce the learning, the workshop topics were to be the basis of classroom homework assignments for the special education families. A successful outcome was to be achieved when at least 20 special education parent and student pairs, who had attended the workshops, completed and returned the homework assignments.

In addition to working with the various groups to increase parent involvement in the academic environment, the

writer intended to promote social activity within the educational system. An anticipated outcome was that parents would plan and sponsor two social activities for special education students, parents and staff during the school year. Activities were to be promoted ahead of time. Success was to be measured by attendance records that indicated at least 100 of the 250 families involved in special education programs attended at least one social function.

Measurements of Outcomes

It was expected that parent participation would increase during the practicum implementation. Evaluations were to use observational logs, attendance records, completed homework assignments, and surveys.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion of Possible Solutions

The problem of designing an appropriate parent involvement program that met the needs of a population of more than 200 students and their families, was a challenging task. It was important to include and listen to individuals who worked with special education students throughout the district and at home. It was expected that including these individuals in the planning and implementation of activities would increase the number of parents of special education students who were actively involved in their child's education.

Educators frequently profess a need for parent involvement. They believe that such support will help improve the educational progress of students. Conversely, parents often claim that educators do not listen or understand what they want for their child.

This writer believes that examination of the desired findings for special education students would reveal very similar results. These parents, like all others, would

address a desire that all children grow up safe and secure, reach their maximum potential and be successful working adults. Unfortunately, this has not been the outcome for all children.

In many situations, parents have been alienated from the educational system by a breakdown in communications. Also, there are other variables that encumber a family's involvement in the educational process. A review of the literature offers a variety of possible solutions to explore.

Our nation's educational system has failed many children during the past century. In many situations, the policy has addressed only the needs of the student and not the needs of the family. The impact that the family has on the growth and development of a child cannot be ignored. In fact, while compiling data, The National Center for Educational Statistics (1992) found that parents have a direct influence on their child's ability to cope in the educational environment. In their reports, they found that limiting television viewing and combining a variety of home activities promoted better coping skills in school. Therefore, it is imperative that schools assist parents in providing the best environment possible to promote the development of the whole child.

Parent involvement program structure can be provided in many different configurations. These programs should all have seven basic elements that are considered essential

(Williams Jr. & Chavkin, 1989). These components include:

1. A networking system that links with other programs and agencies;
2. Training programs for staff and parents;
3. Open and comfortable two-way communication;
4. An approach that demonstrates a joint partnership;
5. Formal written policies;
6. Administrative support;
7. A method to evaluate program success.

The nation is currently undergoing a push toward restructuring so that the needs of all children can be met. To meet the needs of students, service organizations including governmental and private institutions must examine student needs and the needs of the family. It will be necessary to investigate and network agencies to support and provide services for these students and their families (Powell, 1991).

Children are sometimes born to parents who have very little or no knowledge of appropriate parenting skills. For these families, schools should provide programs that promote appropriate child rearing practices (Powell, 1991). These programs should provide training information about the obligations of parental involvement that were identified by Joyce Epstein and reported by Brandt (1989). These include basic obligations as a parent, obligation to schools, involvement at school, parent involvement in learning activities, and involvement in advocacy.

It was found by Schaefer (1991) that workshops that promoted less authoritarian child rearing techniques could possibly help improve a child's school achievement. This was accomplished by rearing a child in a more democratic than authoritarian environment. This type of child rearing process allowed the child to be involved in designing their responsibilities and consequences.

Parent workshops are frequently scheduled at various times during the day. In many cases, minimal parent involvement results from a conflict between the workshop and the work schedule of parents. Professionals should consider the population that they wish to service. In today's society, it is not uncommon for all adults in a household to work. Therefore, to gain support and participation in parent programs, professionals should respond to the needs and availability of working parents. These types of programs are often more successful (Lindle, 1989).

Another solution suggests assisting parents in the home environment. When services are provided in the home, the service provider frequently services more than one generation. In doing this type of program, the provider is able to promote literacy and math competency programs simultaneously to two generations (Darling, 1992; Edwards, 1992; Lueder, 1989).

Parents frequently provide learning activities in their homes that are never shared with others. To help promote a

community sharing network, a "parent educator" along with a teacher could be used. This individual visits homes in the community to record activities that parents already use. Then the "parent educator" shares the activities with other families during future home visits. This type of program builds positive self-esteem and promotes self-worth (Binford & Newell, 1991).

To further strengthen the family unit and family self-esteem, a home book sharing program could be utilized. In this type of program, books and materials are lent to parents to use with children in the home (Heleen, 1992).

Another possible intervention that could be provided is community learning centers. These could be set up in schools, storefronts and churches (Flaxman & Inger, 1992). Activities could be provided in these centers to promote literacy in both adults and children. In addition, these centers could provide assistance with homework assignments.

One of the most crucial elements to a successful parental involvement program is the role of the school administrator. This individual needs to foster an image of being approachable to the people they service. To accomplish this, the administrator must utilize active listening skills, practice smiling, waving and being friendly. In addition, administrators need to be sensitive to the parent's rights and their needs (Katsiyannis & Ward, 1992).

The administrator also should work to establish the

respect of the staff and parents. An environment should be established where parents and staff can develop trust between the groups (Hines, 1993). In developing the trust, parents could be involved on a school management team with administration, teachers and other staff members (Comer & Haynes, 1991).

In an article by Kenner & Gribbin (1992), it is suggested that a "Principal Assistance Committee" be established. The function of this group would be to assist teachers and other staff in setting goals, objectives and program delivery. The group also investigates and recruits aid from the non-parent community members. These "volunteers" are drawn from the business community, seniors in the community and/or grandparents of students in the building.

Parents also could provide assistance in the classrooms. To accomplish this task, the parent would need training. Training could be provided by the teaching staff and/or the administration (Berger, 1991; Hunter, 1989; Dear, Thurlow, & Ysseldyke, 1987).

Description of Selected Solution

The special education parent advisory committee had been in existence for the past twenty years. Its basic function had been to provide a few social events during the school year. In addition, there have been one or two parents who have served as an advocate when the need arose.

After examining the few existing records of the group, the writer discovered that this organization had always functioned independently from the rest of the school system. Decisions were made by the committee members and imposed upon the staff. Further examination of the records showed no networking or intertwining with other organizations within the school system.

It was also anticipated that surveys and/or interest questionnaires would provide preliminary information regarding attitudes toward parent involvement, areas where parents could become involved in the school, interest in social activities and workshop activities that would promote family involvement.

The writer anticipated initiating the practicum through the use of a staff meeting. It was expected that the practicum outcomes would be shared with the staff at this time.

Surveys, letters of interest and memos were used through out the practicum. Invitations to participate were extended to both the staff and the parents several times during the eight months of implementation.

In the initial proposal, the writer anticipated conducting several workshops that networked with the academic program. It was felt that some parents might have been uncomfortable in the school setting. Therefore, after conducting the initial workshops in the school setting, the writer anticipated off-site workshops. The writer wished to

conduct workshops that included parents and students in a learning environment. The initial task was to make contact with the administration, parents and the staff who have previously worked with the writer. In this contact, the writer requested their help in recruiting new parents to assist with group activities. The group collaborated on survey designs and also met to discuss fund raising activities and committee work.

Concurrently with the structuring of the committee, surveys were sent to the staff. The committee felt that letters of interest would be more amiciable to parents. Therefore, letters of interest were distributed to the parents of all special education students.

In order to implement this practicum, several preliminary steps had to be accomplished. They were:

1. A proposal was shared with the superintendent of schools to obtain his approval.
2. A proposal was shared with the director of special education to obtain her approval.
3. The special education staff was notified by memo.
4. Previous members of the parent advisory committee were informed about the results of the writer's research and the suggested timeline for implementation.

Report of Action Taken

The writer initiated a written anecdotal log of all conversations and activities conducted during the practicum implementation. This written record provided data to assess the success of the projected outcomes.

At the onset of the practicum, the writer contacted the director of special education to arrange a meeting to discuss parent involvement within the special education department. The director stated that time would not be available for a meeting for at least seven weeks. The writer insisted a meeting be set prior to that time. After some discussion, a meeting was scheduled four weeks later.

While waiting to have the initial meeting with the director, the writer contacted and discussed the practicum with several colleagues in the special education department. Two teachers volunteered to assist with the parent group.

The writer also contacted the two parents who had worked as active committee members the previous year. An explanation of the practicum was given to each parent individually.

The initial meeting with the director was at the beginning of the second month of implementation. During this meeting, the director suggested that perhaps the project should be abandoned as a lost cause. The writer insisted on attempting it. An agreement was reached that allowed the writer to proceed.

The writer requested a staff meeting be scheduled to discuss the project. The director stated that the building administrators were going to hold one hour meetings every two weeks during the school year. Since, by contract, teachers could not be required to attend more than one, one-hour meeting every two weeks, a meeting would be impossible. After additional discussion, the date for an initial committee meeting was set for two weeks later.

The writer contacted the people who had offered to assist with the committee during the school year. The writer filed the building use form to have the committee meeting in the special services office.

The first committee meeting for the school year was held two weeks after meeting with the director. Attendance was taken. Discussed at the meeting was the proposed use of surveys. The members of the committee thought it best to survey only the staff. They suggested that a letter of interest be sent to the parents instead of a survey. Ideas were brainstormed for survey questions and the letter of interest.

Fund raising was also discussed. One of the staff members was assigned to gather information about fundraisers from other parent organizations in the district.

The next meeting date was scheduled for three weeks later. At the next meeting, members would examine ideas for fundraisers. The group also will contact parents who returned letters of interest.

Surveys were sent through the school mail to 28 staff members (see Appendix A). A letter of interest was sent home with all special needs students from pre-school through twelfth grade. All responses were asked to be returned within one week.

The writer filed a building use form for the next committee meeting. The members of the committee were contacted to verify the next meeting.

A total of two of the surveys and two letters of interest from parents were returned. A reminder note was sent to the staff members and the parents about returning the staff survey and letters of interest.

The second meeting of the committee was held early in the third month of implementation. Attendance was taken. One member returned two additional surveys that had been given to her. Five more letters of interest from parents were returned.

It was decided to contact two of the parents who had expressed interest in working with the committee. The other parents indicated an interest in helping with classroom activities, assisting on field trips and doing some light typing. One of the current parent committee members volunteered to make the first contact.

A report was given on potential fund raising activities. Most of the other school groups were selling some type of candy. The committee decided to contact a

vendor whose fund raising centered around selling pizzas. It was expected that the next meeting would be scheduled when the vendor was available to meet with the group.

One of the committee members contacted the pizza vendor and phoned the writer to schedule the next meeting. The writer contacted the other members of the committee to schedule a meeting in two weeks. A building use form was filed for the next committee meeting.

The parent who had volunteered to phone parents made contact with parents and informed them of the next meeting. The parents were given an explanation about the committee and what it hoped to accomplish this school year.

The committee held its third meeting of the year at the beginning of the fourth month. Attendance was taken. The two parents who had expressed an interest in assisting did not attend this meeting. They explained that they had scheduling conflicts for the evening of the meeting.

The vendor promoting pizza sales did a presentation of the product. The committee decided to try to sell pizzas as a fundraiser. Orders for the pizza kits were to be accepted from the third week of December thru the second week of January. It was to be marketed under the theme of a "Super Bowl" Sale.

It was decided that the proceeds from the sale would be split between the committee and the classroom. The majority of the proceeds would revert to the classroom teacher to use for extra activities, materials and/or field trips. In

addition, prizes were to be offered to students based upon the amount of sales.

Since the holidays were demanding a great deal of everyone's time, the committee decided to schedule the next committee meeting the third week of January. At this meeting, the success of the fundraiser would be discussed. Additionally, the committee would decide what social activity could be sponsored.

Committee members worked together to design the flyer for the pizza sale. Notes were also sent to the staff explaining the reason for the sale. Letters and sales brochures were sent home with students.

During the next few weeks, the paperwork was submitted for the January meeting. The writer went to each building and handed out reminder notes about the pizza sale. The note included directions for the transfer of information back to the committee.

Shortly after the holiday recess the order forms were collected and telephone communications were used to compile sales. One of the committee members phoned the vendor and placed the order. Several parents were contacted to assist in sorting the pizza kits and delivering them to the various buildings. Arrangements were made to phone the parents when the pizzas arrived.

The writer contacted some of the special education teachers about conducting a workshop. Two teachers expressed an interest in the idea. The two teachers were to

contact their administration and establish a time for a meeting and relay information back to the writer.

The information was forwarded to the special services office about the delivery of the pizzas. The names of the parents were provided to them. They were requested to make the phone calls when the pizzas arrived.

The pizzas arrived per the arrangement with the vendor. However, the parents were not contacted to assist with the sorting and delivery. The office staff and the special education director sorted the pizzas and phoned the various teachers to pick-up their orders.

The committee meeting scheduled for January had to be cancelled due to inclement weather. The meeting was rescheduled for two weeks later. Since the January meeting was cancelled, the building use forms had to be resubmitted for the new meeting date.

The committee meeting was held on Monday evening. Attendance was taken. The committee discussed the success of the fundraiser. The results were not as expected. Very few families had participated in the activity. The proceeds were not sufficient to cover a social activity at this time. Ideas were exchanged about how to obtain additional funds. The director suggested that perhaps candy could be sold at the end of the day in the various buildings. The administrative staff was scheduled to have a meeting on Thursday. The idea was to be discussed at the meeting.

The committee reviewed the school calendar and decided

that if another fundraiser could be established, an ice cream social would be scheduled on March 27th. Since the social was to take place just prior to Easter the theme was to be "Hopping into Spring."

The committee scheduled their next meeting for two weeks later. After some discussion, it was decided that notes should be sent to the staff asking them to attend the next meeting. The director offered to send a memo to the staff. The writer requested a copy of the memo that was sent to the staff.

At the administrators' meeting the fundraiser was discussed. Each administrator had a different opinion on how they could support the fundraiser in their building. After the meeting, the director contacted the writer. It was suggested that the writer communicate with each administrator to discuss how to handle the activity in the various buildings. After further discussion, the writer was to contact the three elementary and the middle school principals. The director was to make contact with the high school.

The writer made contact with the four principals. All were co-operative and offered assistance. Each work site offered a different structure in which to sell the candy. The director sent a memo to the staff about the next committee meeting. A copy was sent to the writer.

The two sentence memo gave many staff members the impression that their committee participation was mandatory.

The writer composed another memo and hand delivered it to the staff mailboxes in each building the day after the director's memo was delivered.

The writer contacted the two teachers who had expressed an interest in the workshops. Both staff members said that they had changed their minds. Each one had a different reason for their decision.

The committee meeting was held near the end of the sixth month. Attendance was taken. Conversation centered around the various buildings and the designs of the fund raising. It was decided that an in-house fundraiser would not work. It was suggested that the candy be sent home with students to sell away from the school grounds. This idea was well received by those in attendance. The high school representative was to forward the name of a vendor who could deliver the candy within the next week or two.

The ice cream social was discussed and the staff was receptive to assisting with the function. Ideas about what type of entertainment could be provided during the event were discussed.

The meeting ended with each school's representative taking the ideas back to their colleagues for input. They were to network back to a committee member with the input of the other staff members. The next meeting was scheduled for two weeks later.

Staff members who attended the previous committee meeting phoned the writer with the information from their

colleagues. The high school teachers did not want to participate with either the candy fundraiser or the ice cream social. The high school teaching assistant, who attended the meeting, offered to help by getting high school special education students to help serve the ice cream.

The middle school staff did not want to participate in the candy fundraiser but wanted to do an alternative. It was suggested that they take Easter Bunny pictures at the ice cream social.

The writer networked with administration to schedule the social. Although the March 27th date was originally available, the elementary school parent-teacher conferences had been changed and were to be held on that evening. Therefore, the ice cream social was preempted and had to be rescheduled for sometime in April. The middle school's fundraiser had to be changed. They decided to investigate a flower sale.

The candy vendor was contacted by the writer. Information about the available types of candy was obtained. The candy could be delivered within one or two days after ordered.

The writer informally met before and after school with the staff of two of the elementary schools. During these contacts, the writer promoted the need for staff support to improve parent involvement.

Reminder notes for the committee meeting were placed in staff mailboxes. This was done prior to school on the day

of the meeting.

The committee met in the evening. Attendance was taken. The change in the calendar was discussed. The new theme was "Spring into Spring." The new date was tentatively set for two weeks later, on April 19th.

The group scheduled the next meeting in one week. The director stated that she would be out of town during the next week and would not be at the meeting. The writer filed the building use paperwork for the next committee meeting.

The writer did the initial work to obtain the high school cafeteria for the function. Phone calls were made to make sure the cafeteria was available. The building use paperwork was dropped off to the director's office on Thursday. At this time, the director stated that someone suggested the group do the social on Monday April 18th. This coincided with Leadership Night. The writer said that the requested change would have to be discussed with the other committee members before it could occur. The writer requested that the paperwork be held until all members were consulted.

Two committee members assisted in compiling the permission slips and other paper work needed for the candy sale. Notes and permission slips were sent home with all special needs students from pre-school through grade 5.

The writer informally met with the staff of the third elementary and the middle school. As in the other two buildings, the writer promoted the need for staff support to

improve parent involvement.

The next committee meeting was held on a Monday evening. Attendance was taken. It was decided that the ice cream social should be on April 19th, as first planned.

The committee divided the responsibilities for the social. Each group of staff and parents were given a task to perform for the social. The responsibilities included pricing the ice cream, toppings, paper goods and decorations; securing entertainment; and how each group could contribute. Decorations were to include helium filled balloons that were to be given to the children at the social. In addition, several staff members and the writer were asked to solicit donations for door prizes from local businesses. Another staff member was requested to network with the district's public relations office to obtain local public access cable television coverage of the event.

The next committee meeting was scheduled for the first Monday after the Easter vacation. The writer spoke to the director about filing the paperwork for April 19th. The director could not find the papers that were dropped off two weeks earlier. The writer completed a second set of forms and sent them through the filing process.

The secretary in the high school telephoned the writer to clarify the date. She had received the first set of papers and scheduled the social for April 18th. The writer located the first set of papers in the central office building and had them corrected to reflect the April 19th

date.

Memos were sent to the staff inviting them to the next committee meeting and the ice cream social. Memos were also distributed reminding the staff that candy money was due.

During the Easter vacation, the writer contacted several of the businesses in the area. The writer also made arrangements for the helium and the balloons that were to be handed out at the social.

Upon returning to school after the holiday the writer placed reminder memos regarding the committee meeting in staff mail boxes. Phone calls were made to parent members reminding them of the meeting.

The meeting was again held in the evening. Attendance was taken. Information was compiled and arrangements were made for the party supplies to be delivered to the special services office on or before the day of the ice cream social.

Telephone calls were made to staff members who were not present or represented at the committee meeting. They were asked to do a task relevant to the social. In addition, sign-up sheets were circulated so that staff, parents and students could volunteer to help the evening of the function.

Notes were sent home with students requesting information about number of people who would attend the ice cream social. These were distributed with a request that parents complete the bottom of the form and return it to

their child's teacher within three days.

The writer approached three parents who had not assisted during the year and asked them to assist on the day of the social. They were asked to inflate the balloons with the helium during the school day for the social that evening. They agreed to help.

The special education director contacted an individual in the community who works part time as a clown. The committee contracted her as part of the evening's entertainment.

The staff continued to collect candy money. The monies were turned into a designated staff member in each building. The designated staff member then met with the writer to process the money for deposit and payment to the vendor.

The committee members communicated frequently on Monday to coordinate the activities on Tuesday. A few of the staff, who were asked to help, did not follow through with their assignments. The core committee members completed all the additional tasks prior to the social.

The ice cream social was held on Tuesday in the evening. Attendance was taken at the door when people arrived. This was accomplished by having each family complete a sign in form as they entered the cafeteria. The forms were used to enter the family into the drawing for one of the door prizes donated by area businesses. Tickets for a 50-50 raffle were also sold at the door.

Members of the staff, high school students and parents

assisted in setting up the cafeteria. Decorations were hung and student-made placemats were set on the tables. The middle school staff provided flowers as centerpieces on each table.

"Kiwi, the clown," entertained both old and young for approximately 45 minutes. Individuals socialized and enjoyed each other's company. Door prizes were awarded.

The public relations office sent a member of their staff to cover the social. The committee was interviewed and a video was made for transmission on the local cable T.V. channel in the near future.

The writer asked the director if it would be possible to have a staff meeting to hand out certificates of appreciation. The director stated that a staff meeting would not be possible.

Surveys were distributed to 28 staff members (see Appendix A). They were requested to complete and return them within one week.

Certificates of appreciation and momento bookmarks were given by the writer to the staff and parents who assisted with the ice cream social. Certificates of appreciation and notepads were presented to the high school students who assisted at the ice cream social.

An off-site committee meeting was held to evaluate the ice cream social and the last fundraiser. The success of the candy sale has given the committee the opportunity to schedule either a picnic before the end of this year or a

kick-off activity in the fall of 1994. Since there were only three members present at the meeting, the committee decided to postpone making a decision until the next meeting.

The middle school is preparing to hold a spring flower sale in May. More information is being gathered by the middle school staff.

The surveys were returned during the next week. Of the 28 surveys distributed, 19 were returned.

The next meeting was scheduled for two weeks later. This meeting is scheduled after the conclusion of the writer's practicum implementation time period. While the writer will remain actively involved, additional results will not be included in this practicum report.

Chapter V

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

The goal of this practicum was that an increased number of parents of special education students would participate in the planning and conducting of activities sponsored by the district's special education parent advisory committee.

At the beginning of the practicum, the writer expected that information about the committee's activities could be communicated through staff meetings and intra-district memos. However, in the initial meeting with the director of special education, it was discovered that staff meetings for just the special education staff were not going to exist during this school year.

Therefore, the early communications about the practicum had to be communicated by word-of-mouth and memos. This was accomplished by personal contact by the writer and by recruiting two additional colleagues to work on the committee. These two individuals were staff liaisons throughout the implementation period.

An anticipated outcome was that at least six parents would help plan and conduct the first fundraiser within the

first two months of implementation. This outcome proved to be unrealistic because of communication difficulties encountered at the onset of the practicum. Additionally, the school's paperwork bureaucracy contributed to the time required to schedule meetings and to communicate with the staff. Forms for meetings had to be filed one to two weeks prior to the requested meeting. Furthermore, communications between the organization and staff was slowed by the need to deliver memos, surveys, and notes to each school site.

A second outcome was that all monthly meetings would have to have six parents in attendance. Attendance records were kept at each meeting (see Table 1). The results indicate that attendance varied during the entire practicum. The highest number of attendees was just prior to the ice cream social. The lowest number of attendees was just after the ice cream social.

A third expected outcome was that a larger number of staff, parents, and administration would feel involved in the activities planned by the committee. Originally, it was expected that the success of this outcome would be measured by survey results. Indeed, survey results were instrumental in the assessment process (see Appendix B), but attendance records and fund raising data were also used to monitor this outcome.

Table 1

CSEPAC Meeting Attendance

Meeting	Parents	Teachers	Administrators
1	2	3	1
2	2	2	0
3	2	3	1
4	Meeting Cancelled		
5	2	2	1
6	4	6	1
7	3	4	0
8	4	3	1
9	4	3	1
10	1	2	0

Separate data logs were kept during the two fundraisers. Table 2 shows the number of staff and parent participants, and the proceeds from each of the two fundraisers. This data shows that as the number of staff participation increased so did parent participation in fund the fund raising activity.

Table 2

Participation in Fund Raising Activities

Activity	Parents	Teachers	Proceeds
Pizza Sale	7	4*	$256.92
Candy Sale	42	8**	$1,089.00

* 3 elementary teachers, 1 middle school teacher
** 8 elementary teachers

A data log was also kept to indicate the number of participants who helped organize and participate in the organization of the ice cream social (see Table 3). In addition, attendance was taken as individuals entered this social event (see Table 4). The data collected provided information including the individual's name, the school attended and the teacher's name.

Table 3

Planning and Implementing the Ice Cream Social

Parents	Students	Staff	Administrators
8	5	21	1

Table 4

Attendance at the Ice Cream Social

Parents	Students	Staff	Administrators	School Board
32*	78*	11*	3	2
12**	10**	6**		
10***	6***	1***		
54	105	23	3	2

* = Pre-kindergarten thru grade 5
** = Middle school
*** = High school

Another area the writer wanted to explore was the idea of planning parent-child workshops. This outcome never came to fruition. The reasons for this were several.

Observational logs indicated that the available time to network with the staff at locations away from the writer's

work site was minimal. Each building in the district was on a different time schedule. School start times, lunch hours and school ending hours did not meld. This made it very difficult to communicate at school. In fact, a great deal of the coordination of the committee's activities was conducted from the writer's home in the evening or on weekends. Table 5 indicates the number of phone conversations about committee work that were done in the evening or on the weekend from home and from school during the work day.

Table 5

Writer's Telephone Log

Month	Calls made from school	Calls made from home
1	5	6
2	3	5
3	2	8
4	3	5
5	2	6
6	8	12
7	6	11
8	2	18

Another reason for this outcome not occurring was the lack of staff participation. Time constraints for planning were to be a vital part of this component. The two teachers who originally thought they would try to assist in

implementing workshops had other demands made on them outside of the school environment. Comments made during conversations indicated that other commitments made it impossible for them to find time to organize the workshops appropriately. Therefore, they were no longer interested.

Discussion

Throughout the implementation of this practicum, the writer experienced difficulty. At times, it was very frustrating and problem solving skills were needed every time a possible solution to the problem was initiated. Although only one of the three projected outcomes was met, the data indicated some growth in all three outcome areas. The organization had begun to grow by the end of the practicum.

Teachers often complain that parents are not involved in their child's schooling. However, the opposite may very well be true. The interest that a teacher takes in a child's education also may affect the amount of parental involvement. In examining the results in Tables 1, 2 and 3, this writer questions how the support of the teacher affected the amount of parent involvement. As the teachers supported more activities and fundraisers, the data reveals an increase in parent involvement.

Within this educational system many of the staff members have taught for more than 20 years. Although the survey results indicated that the staff felt that parents

are not adequately involved in the education of their child, this writer questions what they are doing to promote parent involvement. This idea is especially true at the middle and high school level where the number of "I don't know" responses to questions 9 and 11 are higher than the pre-k through grade 5. This writer believes that what occurred at the high school level may actually concur with the findings of Michael, Arnold, Magliocca & Miller (1992). In their research they found that staff who teach older students often view the child as the collaborator and not the parent. Perhaps the staff at this location view the child in this manner. This could be one reason for less parent participation from both the middle and high school levels during all the activities.

During this school year, the middle school has initiated a team teaching approach with all students. On each team in grades 6, 7, and 8 general education teachers team with special education teachers. The special and general education classes are combined and taught with two or three teachers and a teaching assistant. At the end of the practicum, two of the middle school staff mentioned that some of the students thought of themselves as part of the general school population and not a special group. The fact that the teacher survey question 7 collaborates this idea may indicate a possible future direction for involvement in parent organizations at this level. This may have also had an impact on the number of parents and students who

participated in the activities of this special interest organization during this practicum.

It also occurred to this writer that some parents may not want to be identified as part of a population that is considered different from the norm. The number of parents who did not participate in the activities provided by this committee is not known. However, this thought could be the foundation for a new look at parental involvement among families of children with special needs within the district.

Communication is a vital part of the success of any project. Since the department never had staff meetings, communication with the various staff members was quite difficult. The working hours of the staff differed from site to site. Many phone conversations had to be conducted from home in the evening instead of during normal working hours. There were many times when messages had to be left and calls returned because there was no answer in the evenings. The writer thought about communications frequently during the practicum. The ability to communicate would have been easier even if additional staff meetings could have been held at each level within the organization.

The results of questions 13, 14, and 15 on the surveys indicate that communication about the committee existed mostly through memos. Other methods of communication such as Individual Educational Planning meetings were only occasionally cited as a basis of expanding knowledge of the committee's existence.

To have an organization expand, communications between the group and those they service are vital. Written communications should be augmented by personal contact either by phone or face-to-face meetings.

Communications during the practicum implementation were very difficult. Throughout the practicum communications to the majority of parents was done mostly through memos.

To promote the committee's existence, the use of other means of communication should be used to augment memos. Information about the existence and the functions of the parent advisory committee could be relayed through a variety of resources. Knowledge about the committee could be regularly exchanged during parent teacher conferences and at annual meetings with other special education staff. Communications also could be enhanced through media exposure. The use of the local cable station and the school community newsletter could offer information about events that have been sponsored by the committee.

Although several of the ideas used during the practicum were generated by staff and members of the committee, without staff meetings new ideas were tough to generate. A better solution to the problem may have occurred if the structure of the organization had facilitated staff and parent networking. In addition, the staff may have cooperated earlier if the ideas for fund raising and social activities had been generated by periodically linking the

members of the groups.

In this writer's school district, the middle school has moved toward a team teaching approach. In this model, special education students are grouped for instruction with general education students. As this occurs at all levels, it will be necessary for parents to become more involved in the education of their children. The special education staff may encounter new problems in this process. In some schools, there may be only one teacher for all the special needs students enrolled in that building. School improvement should provide a networking system for both the parents and the staff who are affected by the change in the educational service. Without staff meetings and brainstorming sessions, it will be difficult to design a new support system for the parents, students and staff of special needs students.

During the last half of the practicum's implementation, the writer was able to document some growth in the organization. The writer made an extra effort during the this time to make personal contact with various staff members and parents. This factor may have assisted the active growth in the organization during the last half of the practicum.

Individuals need to know that the things they do are not unnoticed. The writer made sure that everyone who assisted and/or supported the organization was acknowledged with certificates and tokens of appreciation. The writer

believes that the memos, personal contact, certificates and tokens of appreciation made a difference during the last half of the practicum. The number of surveys returned at the end of the practicum was more than double the number returned in the beginning. This data supports the writer's belief that when people feel valuable, their opinions will mean something.

Some people have questioned the existence of this organization as the move toward educating children in the mainstream expands. Those who propose this should think of the needs of the special education child and their families. The unique needs of the child do not disappear just because the child is included in the general education classroom. Perhaps the advisory committee could become a networking bridge not only for parents but for the staff as well.

Recommendations

Several aspects need to be considered for this organization to have continued growth and for parents to become more involved. The cultural framework of an organization is one of the foundations that can either propel it forward or cause it to become static.

Educators in the past have been accustomed to working alone in their classrooms. In the field of special education, many have had the experience of working with other service personnel and ancillary teachers. However, only a few have experienced teaming and working with other

classroom teachers.

At the culmination of this practicum, some staff in the district had been working in teaching teams for an entire school year. Given the opportunity, these individuals could act as a supporting mechanism for the staff members who are investigating new methods of servicing students with special needs in other locations.

Many individuals believe that all students should be educated in the general education classroom. This inclusive program will not make the handicaps disappear. As educators and parents of special needs students, it is imperative that the focus remain on the needs of the child and not on the needs of the system. If the plan is to work, there needs to be time for planning the delivery of the child's educational needs in the new environment.

It is always easier when a team works to accomplish a task. Special educators and parents of special needs students are no different. To attain a level of security during the change process, this writer believes that staff meetings will be imperative. During these meetings staff could discuss issues of interest that deal with the unique populations they educate. In addition, the only way to foster human relationships, security and a feeling of teamwork is to allow individuals the opportunity to network with others who are involved in the change.

As the push toward educating students with special needs in the general education classroom increases, it will

be vital to have a support system in place. The system should not only be there for the staff but also for the parents of the special needs students. The district parent advisory committee needs to recruit parents who have children in the less restrictive team teaching environment. These parents can offer both support to other parents and also enhance their child's education by giving input into the process so adjustments can be made.

Dissemination

The outcomes of this practicum have been shared with the superintendent of schools, the director of special education, and the members of the parent advisory committee. The writer expects to continue to be involved with the staff and parents of special needs students within the school district. It is the belief of this writer that support systems for parents and educators of special needs students will continue to exist. Therefore, this writer expects to share the ideas and the experiences of this practicum with other interested parent advisory committees in the county.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY OF ATTITUDE REGARDING PARENT INVOLVEMENT

SURVEY ON ATTITUDES REGARDING PARENT INVOLVEMENT

The purpose of this survey is to ascertain current attitudes regarding parent involvement within special education. Your response will provide information for future program development. Please **do not** include your name on the survey.

Directions: Please circle the number that correlates the closest with your views for each statement.

5 = strongly agree
4 = agree
3 = disagree
2 = strongly disagree
1 = I don't know

1. I feel the parents of my students are adequately involved in the education of their child.	5 4 3 2 1
2. I usually have no difficulty getting parents to assist in my classroom.	5 4 3 2 1
3. The parents of my students are involved with the parent group in my building.	5 4 3 2 1
4. I feel parents are uncomfortable dealing with a student who has special needs.	5 4 3 2 1
5. I make frequent contact with the parents of students in my classroom.	5 4 3 2 1
6. I believe most parents of my students are actively involved with their child in extra curricular activities.	5 4 3 2 1
7. My students attend extra curricular activities offered by the school.	5 4 3 2 1
8. My students are involved in extra-curricular activities offered by outside agencies.	5 4 3 2 1
9. The parents of my students will usually assist in the classroom upon my request.	5 4 3 2 1
10. The parents of my students appear to be proud of their child's accomplishments.	5 4 3 2 1
11. Parents are eager to chaperone field trips.	5 4 3 2 1
12. Information about the advisory committee and its activities are relayed through memos.	5 4 3 2 1
13. Discussion of parent involvement occurs at IEPC meetings.	5 4 3 2 1
14. Information about the parent advisory committee is given to parents on a frequent basis.	5 4 3 2 1
15. Information about the activities of the parent advisory committee are announced at staff meetings.	5 4 3 2 1

Please respond to the following statements:

Parents would be more receptive to participate in school activities if _____

_____

_____

_____

To get parents more involved, the parent advisory committee should _____

_____

_____

_____

Communication between the parent advisory committee and staff could be improved by _____

_____

_____

_____

Please feel free to make any suggestions and/or comments about parent involvement within the special education department. _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

Instructional Level: Pre-K thru grade 5 _____

Grade 6 thru 12 _____

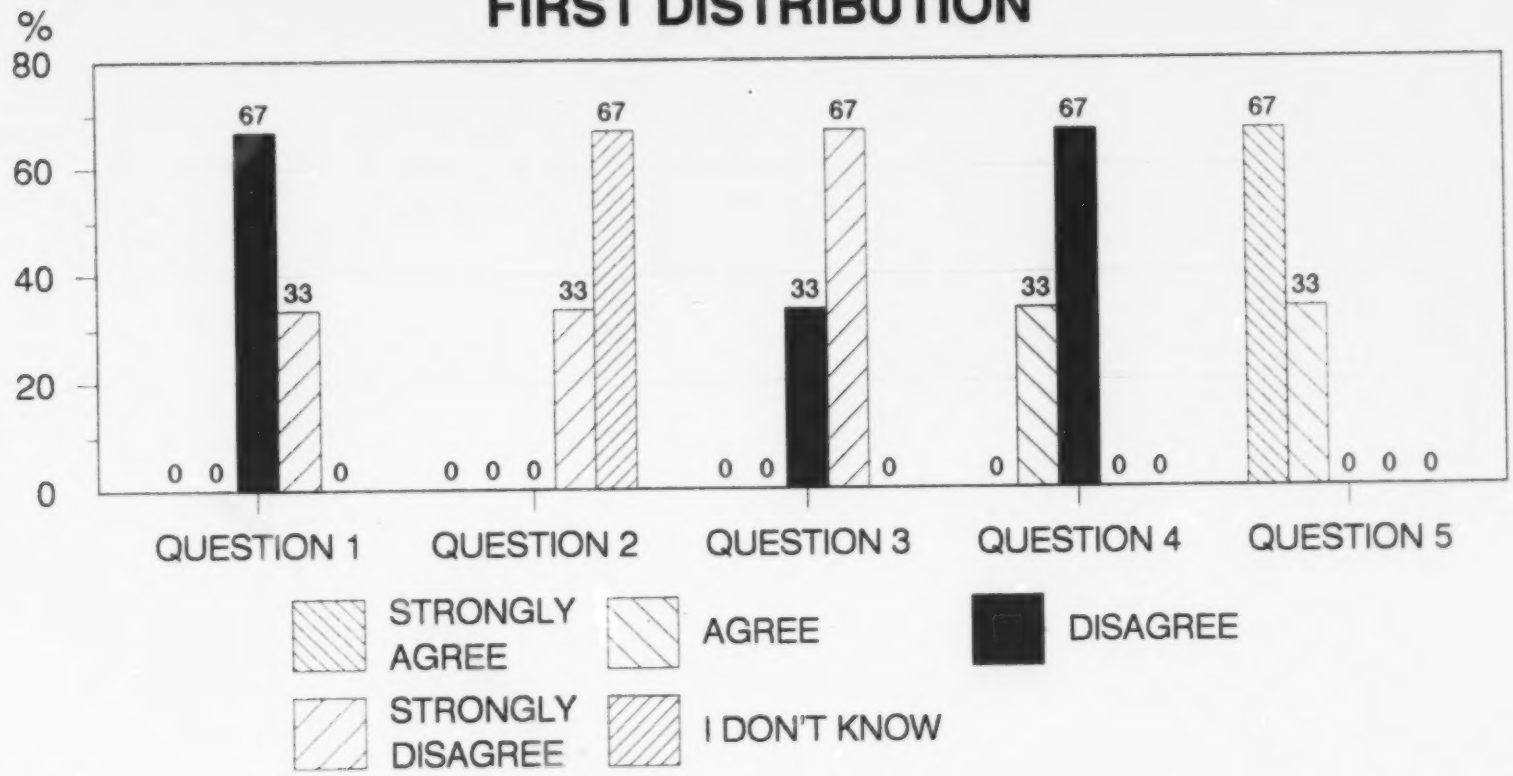
APPENDIX B

RESULTS OF SURVEY REGARDING PARENT INVOLVEMENT

CSEPAC ATTITUDE SURVEY RESULTS

PRE-KINDERGARDEN THRU GRADE 5

FIRST DISTRIBUTION


%
80
60
40
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33
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CSEPAC ATTITUDE SURVEY RESULTS

PRE-KINDERGARDEN THRU GRADE 5

FIRST DISTRIBUTION

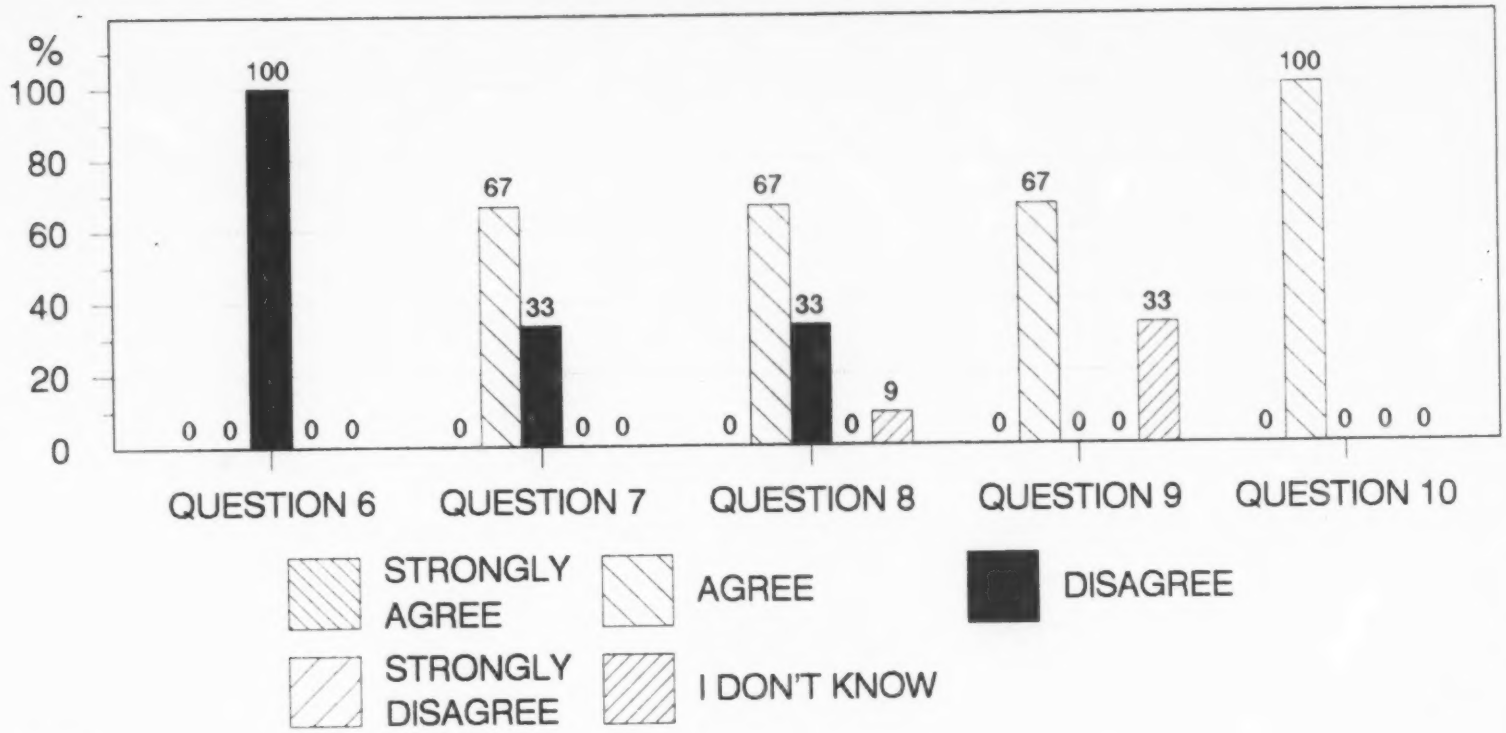

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Figure 2

Percentage rounded up when .5 or higher

CSEPAC ATTITUDE SURVEY RESULTS

PRE-KINDERGARDEN THRU GRADE 5

FIRST DISTRIBUTION

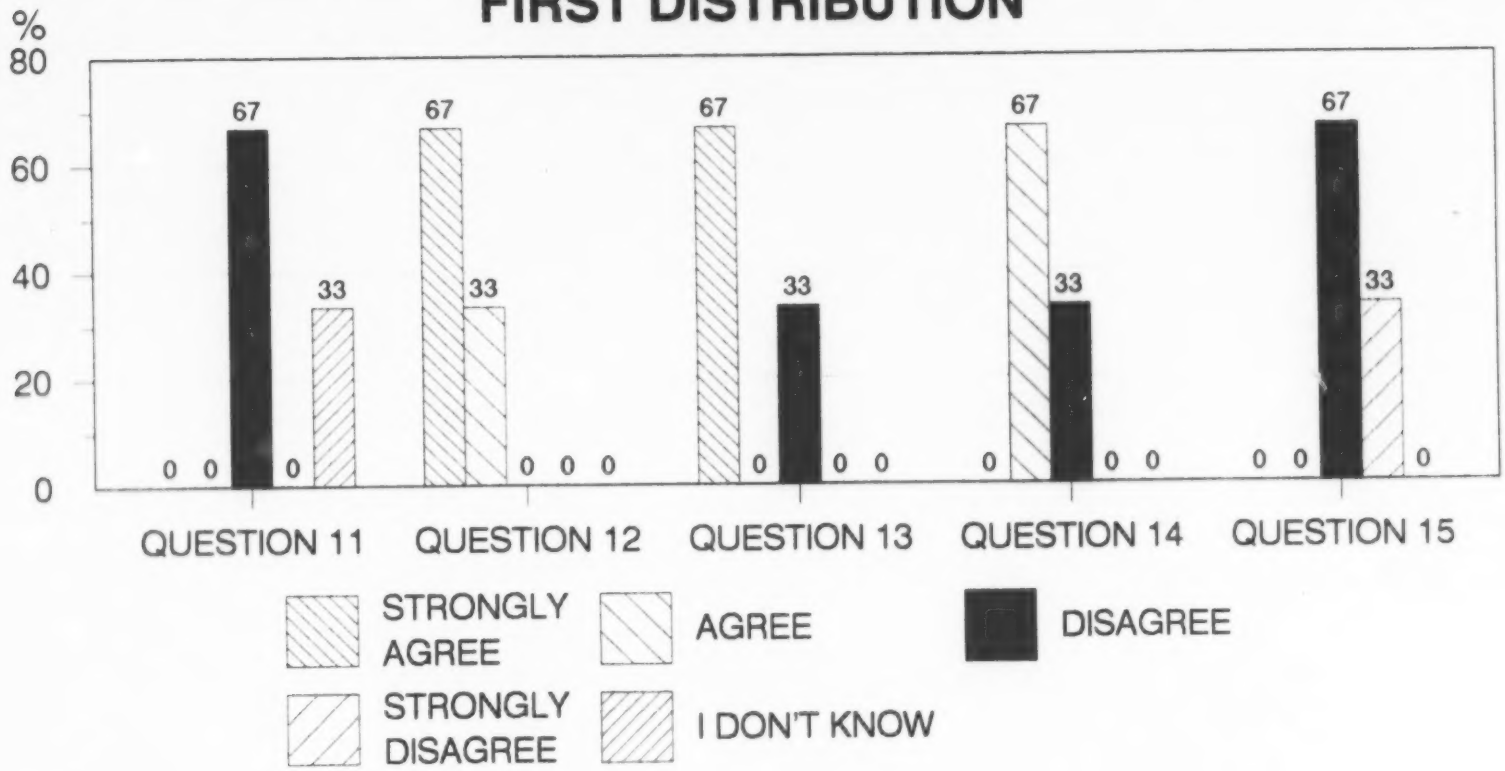

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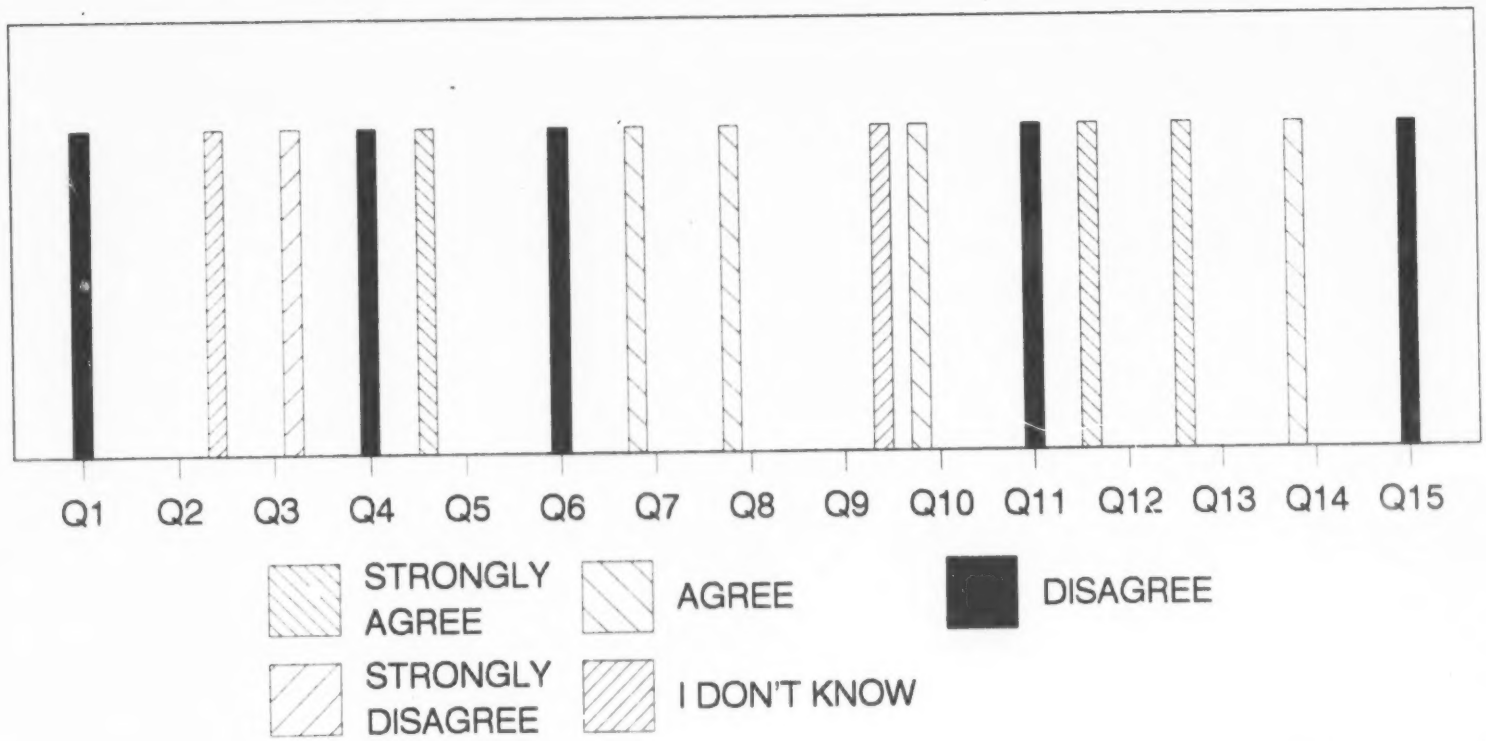
Figure 3

Percentage rounded up when .5 or higher

CSEPAC ATTITUDE SURVEY RESULTS

GRADES 6 THRU 12

FIRST DISTRIBUTION



n=1
Figure 4

CSEPAC ATTITUDE SURVEY RESULTS

PRE-KINDERGARDEN THRU GRADE 5

SECOND DISTRIBUTION

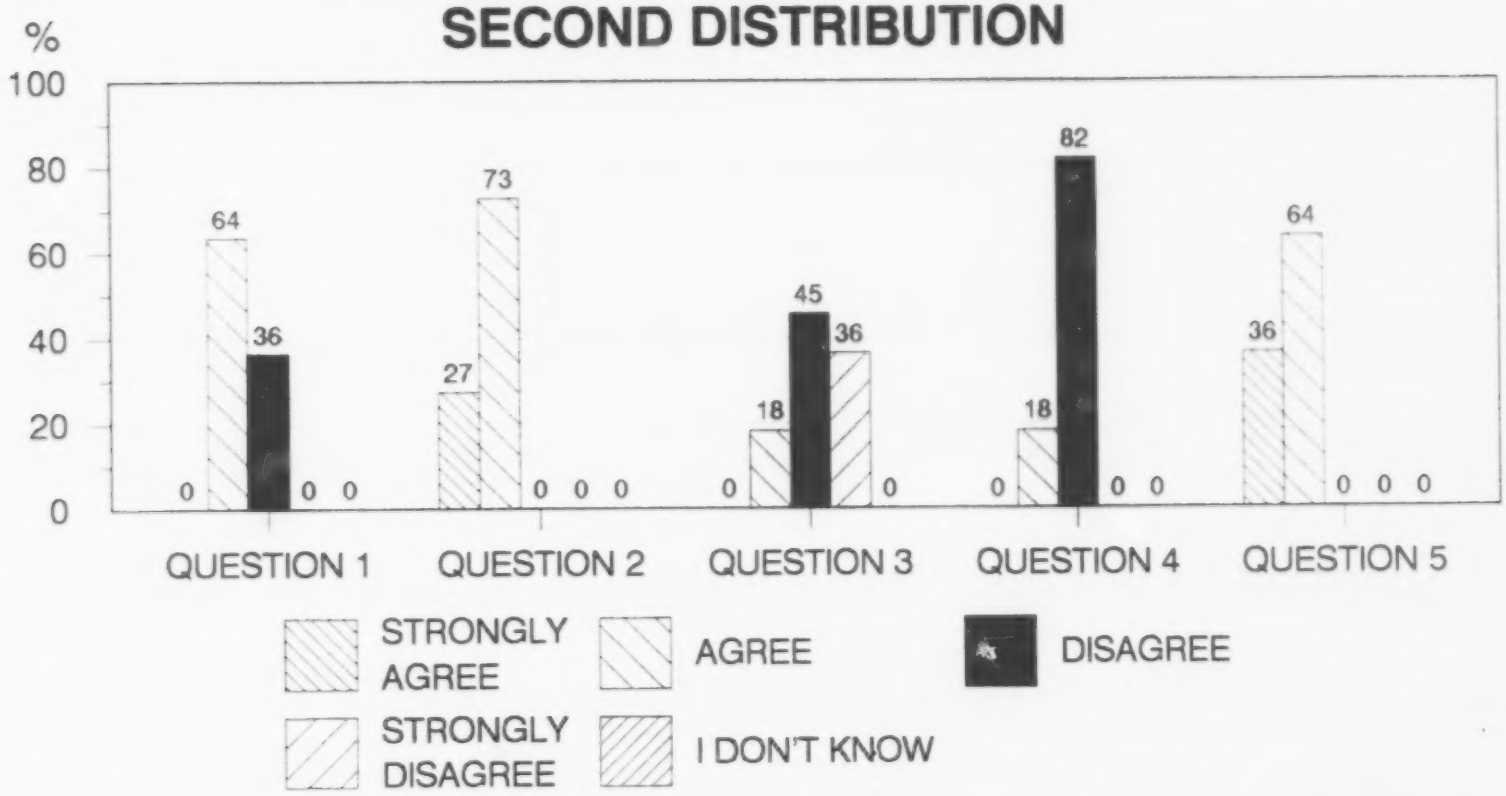


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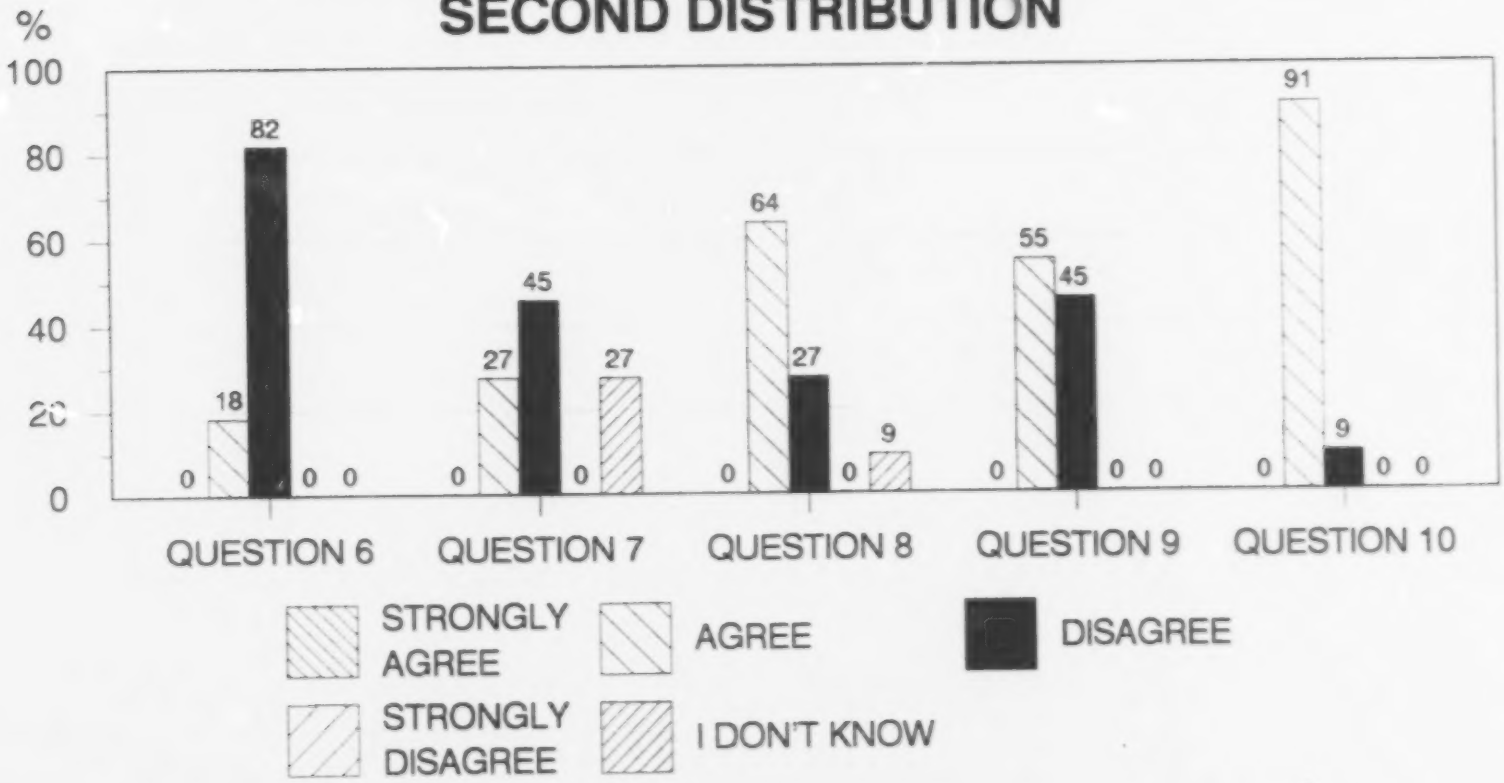
Figure 5

Percentage rounded up when .5 or higher

CSEPAC ATTITUDE SURVEY RESULTS

PRE-KINDERGARDEN THRU GRADE 5

SECOND DISTRIBUTION



n=11

Figure 6

Percentage rounded up when .5 or higher

CSEPAC ATTITUDE SURVEY RESULTS

PRE-KINDERGARDEN THRU GRADE 5

SECOND DISTRIBUTION

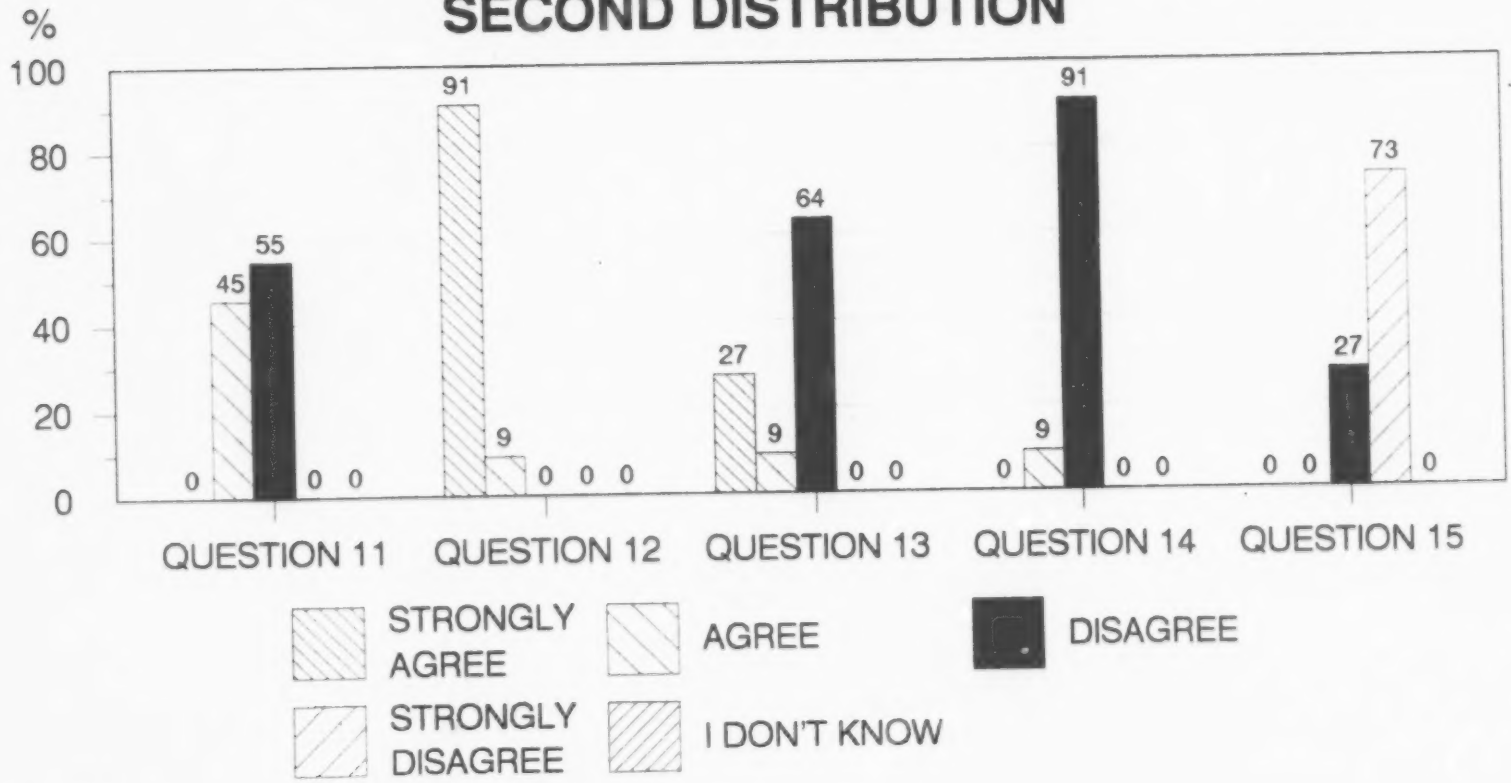


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Figure 7

Percentage rounded up when .5 or higher

CSEPAC ATTITUDE SURVEY RESULTS

GRADES 6 THRU 12

SECOND DISTRIBUTION

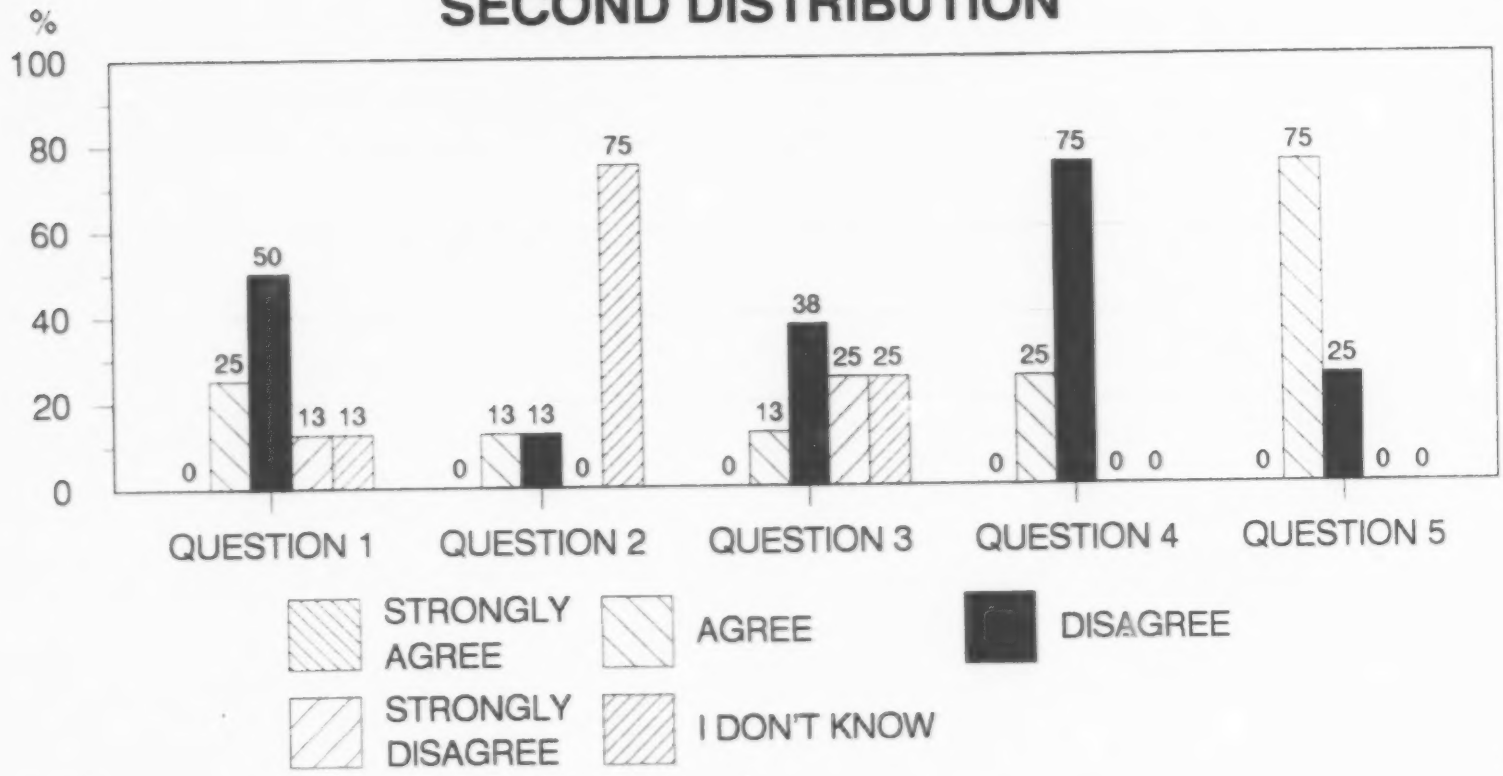

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Figure 8

Percentages rounded up when .5 or higher

CSEPAC ATTITUDE SURVEY RESULTS

GRADES 6 THRU 12
SECOND DISTRIBUTION

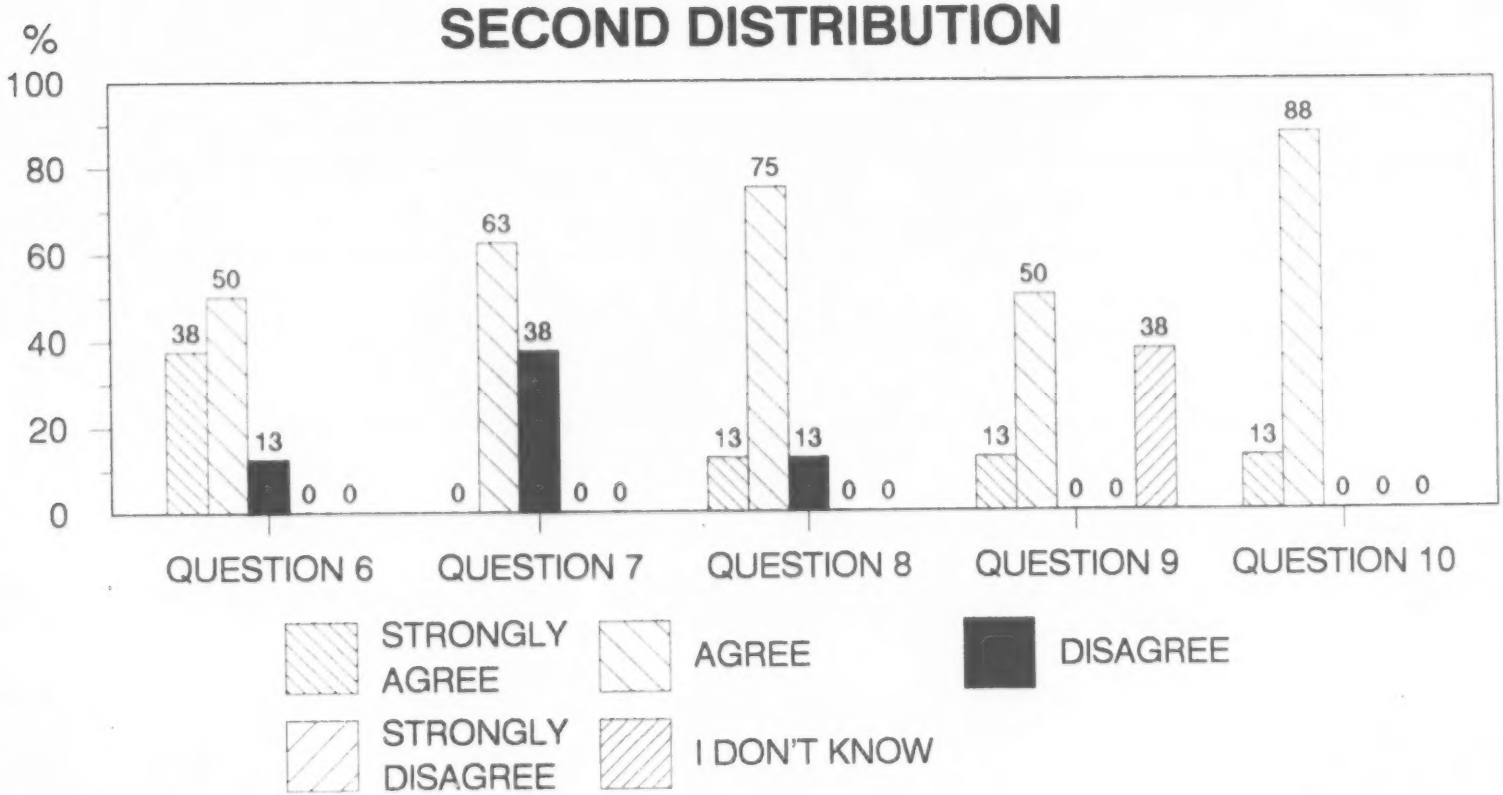

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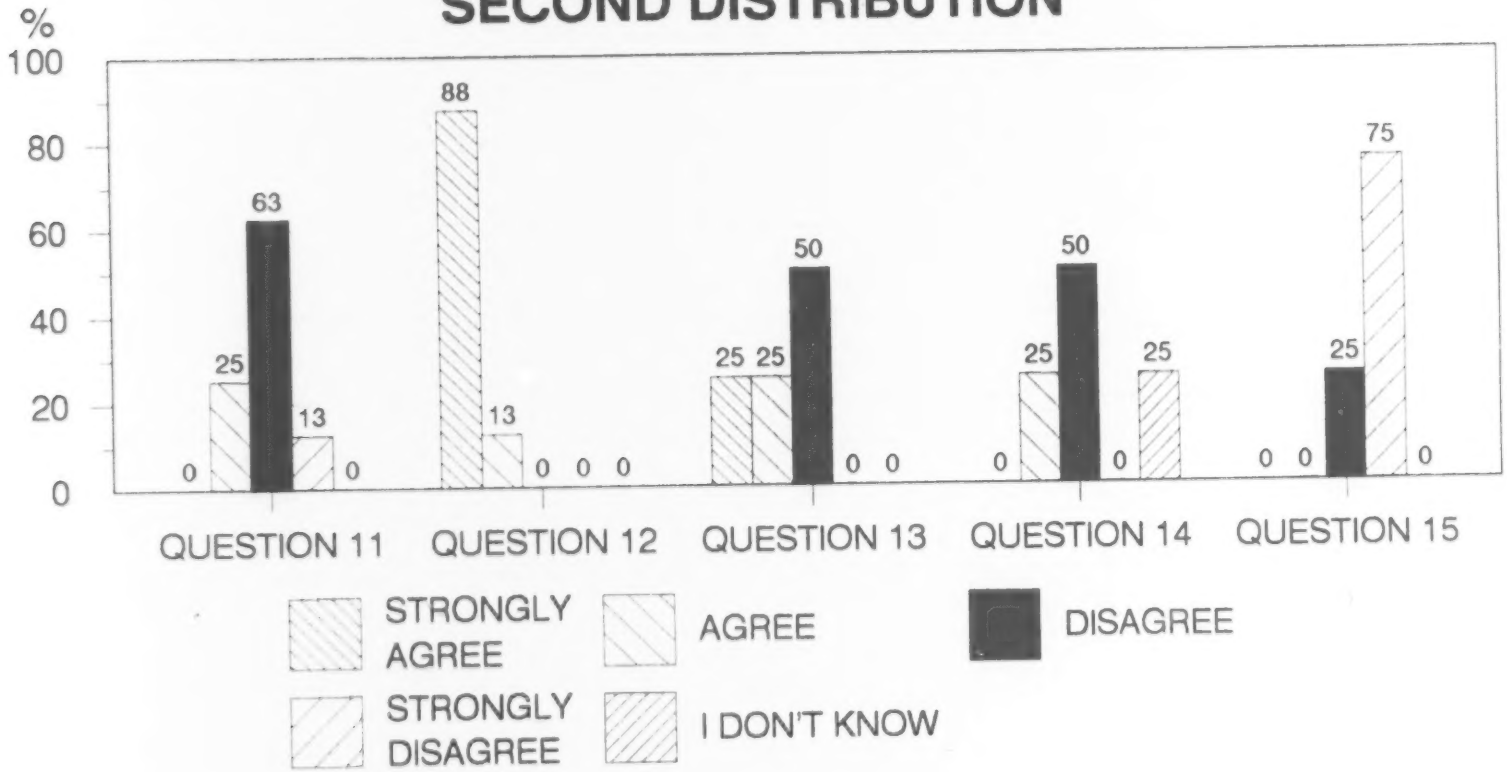
Figure 9

Percentage rounded up when .5 or higher

CSEPAC ATTITUDE SURVEY RESULTS

GRADES 6 THRU 12
SECOND DISTRIBUTION



n=8

Figure 10

Percentage rounded up when .5 or higher